



# Old Roses FROM DOWN UNDER

*Gregg Lowery*

**I**n November of 2006 I had the pleasure of spending two weeks visiting rose gardens and meeting rosarians in South and Western Australia. Invited to speak at the biannual conference of Heritage Roses in Australia Inc. (HRIAI), I arrived to the enthusiastic hospitality of a group of old rose lovers. It proved an experience that I will never forget and introduced me to friends that I hope to keep for the rest of my life. I made the journey with Phillip Robinson. His respected powers of observation of old roses and our collection of several thousand antique roses had drawn the attention of some Australians. So when we arrived, it was no surprise that the first place we were taken to was a cemetery in Adelaide to see if we could possibly identify some foundlings.

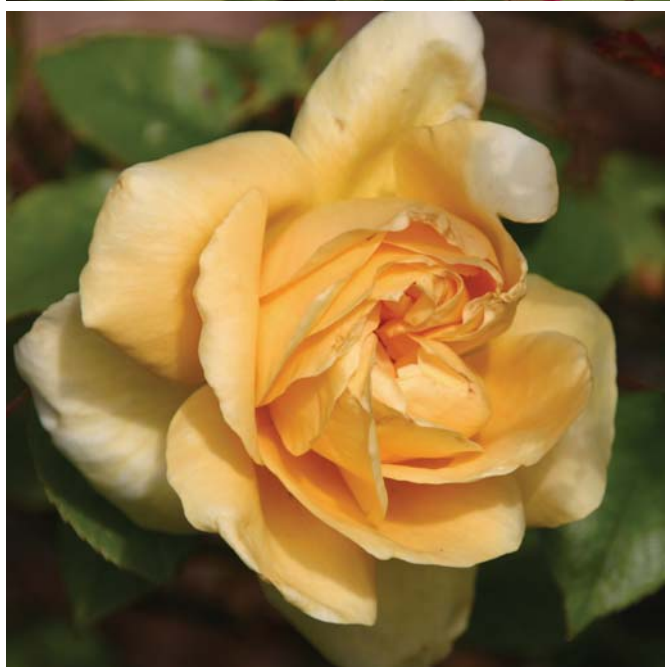
ABOVE: A view of the Barossa Rose Repository. TOP RIGHT: "Miss Reidel's Rose". CENTER: "Stockport Yellow" Tea. BOTTOM: "Dr. Russel's Yellow"/"Beryl". All photos by Gregg Lowery.

## FOUND ROSES AND PRESERVATION IN AUSTRALIA

Those who admire old roses are a cheerful and adventurous lot, but they are serious about their roses. The nameless ones, the foundling roses, get very special attention, rather as if they were children long separated from their parents. Nowhere does this seem truer than in Australia.

In Adelaide, Margaret Furness introduced us to sites where the old roses of Australia are preserved and found roses venerated. At Mitcham Cemetery, a Victorian park overlooking the city, she showed us an old Hybrid Tea, creamy white and semi-double, which we recognized as a ringer for a California foundling known as “BERYL”. In the old German settlement of Hahndorf we met another familiar mystery rose, the Hybrid Perpetual known to us as “GLENDDORA”, to them as “ARIE BOS’ ROSE”. We also visited the Gamble House, a historic homestead run by the National Trust. The Gamble garden, developed under the guidance of Trevor Nottle, founder of Heritage Roses in Australia, offers a sampling of old roses found in the area. And at the Blakiston cemetery we witnessed the great glory of dozens of old roses, from Gallicas to Teas, gracing the churchyard with abandon. I shall never forget the sight of CHARLES DE MILLS suckering through a thicket of pale lavender watsonias.

Mitcham Cemetery and Blakiston churchyard are designated as “rose repositories,” their protected status marked at the entries with permanent plaques that encourage visitors to respect the significance of old roses as historic artifacts. The plants are tended, renewed, and added to by a small core of volunteers who lug water uphill on 100° summer days. HRF trustee Pat Toolan has played a guiding role in





establishing these repositories and recruiting volunteers.

Pat met us in Angaston, two hours inland from Adelaide in the Barossa Valley, one of Australia's finest wine-growing regions. We trekked to several small graveyards where old roses grew and the familiar brass plaques announced another rose repository. The most impressive of all was the repository developed by Pat and her group in the old market town of Angaston. This delightful garden with its arbors, pillars, and swags of roses contained a treasury of found roses, including a golden yellow Tea, "STOCKPORT YELLOW", and a globular deep pink beauty, "MISS REIDEL'S ROSE".

In the days to follow we came to understand the dedication of Australia's old rose community and their many efforts to create oases where old



rose preservation can succeed. Lynne Chapman, a member of the Tea Rose Group of Western Australia, greeted us at Pinjarra near Perth, a cemetery developed as an old rose garden much like the Sacramento Old City Cemetery in California. And Noelene Drage, also of the Tea Rose Group, guided us through Araluen Botanic Garden's historic rose collection where one of the finest collections of Tea roses in the world resides alongside a superb collection of the roses of Australian breeder Alister Clark. Noelene not only works to conserve old roses, but was also instrumental in saving Araluen and developing it as a garden of botanical and historic merit.

The dedication of those who study found roses is exemplified by Patricia Routley, who maintains a very large garden and collection of found roses in the midst of the Kauri forest, a vast stand of giant eucalyptus in the southwest corner of the continent. She methodically documents each rose with notes on botanical features and provenance. She generously shared her notebooks with us in the hope that we might find some of these roses growing in our corner of the world. Many very rare named varieties grace her garden, including early 20th century Hybrid Teas that no longer exist in collections in Europe and North America.

Perhaps the most moving symbol of the rose in human history that I have experienced was the Rose Maze at Kodja Place in the rural village of Kojonup, three hours from Perth. This garden tells the stories of three Australian women of the 20th century: an English woman, an immigrant Italian woman, and an Aboriginal woman of the Noongar people. The tortured paths of the maze are peppered with entries in the diaries of these three fictional characters, and the story of modern Australia unfolds amidst hedges of roses. The roses, quite naturally, are Australian roses, both those created there by breeders like Clark and Riethmuller, and those found there, like CLIMBING DUCHESSE DE BRABANT.

#### A NATIONAL COLLECTION OF ROSES

Against the backdrop of so many gardens that preserve Australia's rose heritage, one garden looms very large—so large that it has been designated Australia's National Collection of Roses. It is David Ruston's collection of over 4,000 cultivars of old, classic, and modern roses. David



ABOVE LEFT: Grass Tree (*Xanthorrhoea* sp.) at Araluen Botanic Gardens. LEFT: Pergola at Araluen. RIGHT: Linda Porter.



led a fast-paced introduction to his extraordinary garden, during which he offered the names of several hundred roses and trailed us across many acres of roses, perennials, and flowering shrubs. His farm, which sells bud wood and cut flowers, is laid out as a massive cottage garden seeded with hollyhocks, iris, and more. Many of the roses preserved in David's collection exist nowhere else on earth. Heritage Roses in Australia has not only designated the garden a national collection of roses, but is working with David to duplicate the rarest cultivars and plant them in other repositories, such as Araluen near Perth. I was particularly surprised to find there LINDA PORTER, the old Hybrid Tea rose lost to cultivation in America, which gained so much attention after the recent American film on the life of her husband, Cole Porter.

#### OLD ROSE GARDENS IN A DRY CLIMATE

During the HRIA conference in Perth, several days of garden tours in Western Australia afforded an opportunity to see and understand the challenges that gardeners face in that near desert climate. Near Perth our tour took us to Quatre Saisons, an elegant garden of arbors and sweeping pathways. At Walnut Cottage near Bridgeport, a palette of drought-resistant Mediterranean shrubs and perennials—from California poppies to Australian bottlebrush—created the

perfect combination with Tea roses, Chinas, and Hybrid Musks. The magnificent creation of Del Bibby, called Morella, where old roses and perennials feather into a rich and colorful native bush thick with grass trees brought me to a deeper understanding of how old roses can co-exist with the unfettered natural garden.

#### OLD ROSE FELLOWSHIP AT THE ANTIPODES

What came as something of a surprise was my discovery that in Australia the heritage roses group boasts a much greater membership than the modern roses group. This has made for a large national organization focused on the old roses and a fellowship where a shared passion for the beauty and history of roses takes the place of the competitive rose shows. The presentations at the HRIAI conference were of the highest order, but more importantly the congeniality of the event and friendly and passionate attitude of those we met left me eager to return. I'll do that this November when HRIAI stages its next conference on the Mornington Peninsula, south of Melbourne. If you have a hankering to attend, you'll not regret meeting the roses, the gardens, and the people of Australia.



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OPPOSITE TOP: Del Bibby's garden. CENTER: Cecily Lascelles, an Alister Clark rose. BOTTOM: Noongar mosaic at Kodjanup Rose Maze. ABOVE RIGHT: David Ruston's roses.